

Letters to Parents Regarding Screening

The South Dakota School Height and Weight Report data collection effort is a surveillance project that is intended to look at the total results for the school, district, and state. Some schools also choose to notify parents of their individual students' results. If that is your district's choice, the following issues should be kept in mind:

- When individual students are evaluated, this becomes a screening process. BMI-for-age *screens* for weight problems but does not *diagnose* them. Further assessment is needed to determine if the child is too fat or too thin.
- Is active permission obtained from parents for other types of screening done in the school, for example, vision? If so, weight and height should be added to this permission form. See below for sample wording to inform about screening permission. Many schools do height and weight as part of their school's yearly health screenings and do not seek active permission. Problems can be avoided if parents are kept informed about what is happening to their children such as through school newsletters, handbooks, or notification letters. Wording in the Sample Screening Active Permission Form below may be useful for this. Active permission of parents is not needed to send data which does not include student names to the Department of Health.
- How are parents notified of other screening results? It is recommended that all parents receive results of the height and weight screening rather than just parents of children who may be overweight. This will help reinforce positive results and not identify students who are overweight. A respectfully worded letter should be developed to notify parents. The letter should not label the child but should request the parents seek further assessment by a health professional. Mail results directly to parents. Do not send the letter home in a child's backpack.
- You may want to provide additional resources to parents to help them understand this screening or the consequences of children with excessive weight. There are a number of pamphlets available without charge from the Department of Health Online Resource Center at <https://apps.sd.gov/applications/PH18Publications/secure/Puborder.asp>. Nutrition pamphlets such as *Overweight Children –A Rising Epidemic* or *Juice Tips for Parents* can be found under the Family Health tab. Physical Activity pamphlets such as *What is Body Mass Index?* and *Tips to Reduce TV Watching in Children and Adults* can be found under the Health Promotion tab.
- Schools should identify sources of help in the community for families with weight concerns. Are the physicians in your community supportive of your efforts and accepting of referrals and parents' questions? A new obesity clinical toolkit for healthcare providers will be provided to South Dakota physicians this fall which should assist them with any questions they might receive from their patients.
- Who is going to handle questions from parents? Is school staff, i.e., the school nurse, ready to provide positive guidance to students who request help with weight reduction?
- Review school policies and practices related to physical activity and nutrition. Inform parents about any practices in place which support healthy eating and increased physical activity.

Sample Screening Active Permission Form

Dear Parents,

We are gearing up to weigh and measure all children in our school to determine how they are growing. The (school nurse, physical education teacher) will conduct this measurement on (date). The purpose of this measurement is to screen for possible weight concerns. The

screening tool used is the body mass index (BMI) for age chart. This method calculates a child's weight to his/her height. All measures will be taken to safeguard your child's privacy.

You will be notified of the results of this screening. Because body weight and body type are sometimes issues of extreme sensitivity for students and families, please indicate and sign below whether you wish your son or daughter to participate in the screening.

Sample Parent Notification Letter

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child was recently weighed and measured in our school to determine how he/she is growing. These measurements are used along with age and gender to figure body mass index percentile (BMI), a screening test that tells if a person is overweight, at risk of overweight, a healthy weight, or underweight. BMI screens for weight problems but does not diagnose them. Assessment is needed by a health provider to determine if a child is too heavy or too thin.

If a child is overweight, it is usually because the child has too much body fat. Children who have too much body fat have higher risk of health problems than those who have a healthy weight. Overweight and at risk children are more likely to become overweight or obese adults. Obesity may lead to diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and many other problems. Children who are underweight may also have health problems. Rarely, a child's BMI may be high (overweight or at risk of overweight) because the child is very muscular. Being muscular does not increase health problems for children. Only a doctor can tell if a BMI is high because of too much body fat.

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|--|----------------|------------------------------|
| Name of Student: | | Date of Measurements: |
| Height: | Weight: | BMI: |
| BMI-for Age Percentile: | | |
| BMI-for-Age less than 5 th percentile = underweight | | |
| BMI-for-Age between 5 th and 84 th percentile = healthy weight | | |
| BMI-for-Age 85 th – 94 th percentile = at risk of overweight | | |
| BMI-for-Age 95 th percentile and above = overweight | | |

What should you do? Please share the results of this health screening with your child's health care provider. A single BMI-for-age calculation is not enough to evaluate long-term weight status because height and weight change with growth. Tracking growth patterns over time can help you make sure your child is achieving or maintaining a healthy weight.

Regardless of your child's current status, help them develop healthy weight habits by eating healthy food, participating in physical activity on most (preferably all) days of the week, and by limiting television viewing.

(You may want to list activities your school is undertaking to improve student health, such as SD Schools Walk or changes in vending machine choices.)

If you have further questions, please contact (name and phone number).

Respectfully,

Name and title